

The Privileged

Officers in the British Army in Canada

by Carol Whitfield



1 "Officer's Trophy Room" by Cornelius Krieghoff (Royal Ontario Museum)
2 "A ball in the residence of Prince Arthur from The Illustrated London News - Oct. 2, 1869, pp 324 (Public Archives of Canada)
3 "A fox hunt in the country - Captain Bubbla drives Miss Muffin" Watercolour by A. Killaly (Public Archives of Canada)



"The friendly and intelligent gentlemen of the garrison had little to do save read, hunt for fossils, fish, shoot, cut down trees, and plant potatoes."

This picture of the life of British army officers is corroborated by other observers and by those officers who wrote memoirs. Life for the commissioned ranks of the British army stationed in Canada was easy; their job made few demands in peacetime and their many privileges made leisure enjoyable.

In contrast to the men they commanded, officers received leave almost as frequently and for as long as they wanted. Some of their autobiographies do not even mention work but rather are accounts of fishing and hunting expeditions or trips touring the United States. Work, the job of training and commanding the rank and file, was pictured as an intrusion upon their social life.

Most officers were second or third sons of the English upper class and if not already independently wealthy, were invariably provided with generous allowances. This, in addition to the ample sum they received in daily wages and allowances, permitted them to indulge in their every whim. One improvident young man who had drawn his father's censure, bemoaned the fact that he was too poor to join his comrades on yet another tour of the United States.

Most officers had sufficient funds to maintain several horses and a sleigh. With these necessities they formed sleighing clubs and entertained the daughters of the wealthier merchants and officials of the colonies. These young women, commonly known as "Miss Muffin," frequently were escorted by the officers on excursions out of Quebec City. The sleighs, replete with hampers of food and wine, would

leave the city to spend the day at the ice cone at Montmorency Falls or inspecting the Indian village at Lorette. When the commanding officer realized that a particular Miss Muffin was being courted more than a diversion, the smirking young officer was sent back to England on a special duty, for marriage with a colonial was considered a very improvident step by the military. The girls' parents, naturally, held a totally divergent opinion: marriage with a young officer, a man from a good family with excellent prospects was an eminently suitable match that could well provide the Canadian family with useful English connections.

Hence British army officers found themselves welcome guests in Canadian homes. Balls, dinner and card parties were held regularly and the officers often abetted these social functions by lending the regimental band.

When officers were not invited out, they had the comforts and companionship of the regimental mess. Each officer contributed a portion of his pay towards equipping and running his mess, many of which had fine china and crystal to embellish the meals.

Unlike their poor subordinates sitting down to boiled beef and soup, the officers' mess usually had a menu of several choice dishes and a wine cellar that included port, claret, and champagne.

After the officers retired from their mess each evening they had two alternatives — their library or their individual rooms. Cornelius Krieghoff's painting of "An Officer's Trophy Room" is a depiction of opulent clutter. The walls are covered by oil paintings and sports equipment, particularly bridles and reins for his horses. There is a bookcase whose contents have spilled on to the floor. Furs are spread over some of the furniture and a dog enjoys the freedom of the room.

Obviously this officer preferred an untidy room or he would have ordered his servant to clean his quarters. Each officer was allowed one private to act as his personal valet and the senior officers sometimes had several servants. These servants relieved the officers of the tedium of caring for their uniforms and horses, allowing them more leisure to indulge their hobbies.

Many officers were amateur painters who

have left us a record of our country in watercolours and oils. A recent exhibit at the Public Archives of Canada — "Image of Canada" — featured a large proportion of military art. Frequently their training in military draftsmanship is readily apparent: buildings resemble an engineer's sketch and the settings are military encampments.

In one other area British officers contributed significantly to Canada's artistic heritage. During the 18th and 19th centuries amateur theatre was a popular pastime in England, and the officers fostered it in Canada. Garrison theatricals were a frequent event open to the public. Sometimes these productions were organized as a benefit for a local cause, but usually they were just an outlet for the energy and amusement of the officers.

Life for these privileged men was not just makebelieve and diversion. A few were sustained by an overwhelming sense of purpose: the preservation of the British empire and the spread of religion to their concept of Christian morality. Nevertheless many of them drifted through their time in British North America enjoying lives of self-indulgent pleasure so markedly in contrast to the men they commanded.

From: "The Shoe and Cane or Pictures of Travel in the Canada's" Vol. 2, pp. 139, Chapman and Hall, London, 1850

4 "Fishing and hunting—two popular pastimes of British officers" — captured in watercolour.

5 "Fishing party Lake Charles—Marley, Tomkins, and Adjutant Cockburn" — by J.P. Cockburn (Public Archives of Canada)

6 "Fox shooting at St. Andrews N.B." — by Lieut. James Cumming Clarke (Public Archives of Canada)

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Byways and Special Places



canals combine leisure activities with historic interest (see story this issue)

Now there is to be more.

"Byways and Special Places"

takes a bold

step into the future to enhance the present program and extend it in several new directions.

Proposed...

National Marine Parks — to take advantage of the fact that Canada possesses 60,000 miles of coastline and the largest body of fresh water in the world.

National Landmarks — the small but unique wonders of nature that need protection — the Churchill Carter in northern Quebec, frozen pingos of the arctic, badlands of the prairies and the many caves in our mountains and seascapes.

Wild Rivers — unhampered, as yet unhampered by industry — a wide variety of rivers many of them of historic interest, offer white and placid water for the contemporary voyageur. Action will be taken immediately to acquire, protect and interpret the best of these

categories before the enigmas of the 20th century — pollution, waste and industrial progress — destroy them.

Linking the various units of the expanded program will be another challenge faced by the Conservation Program. Already under study are concepts of *Historic Land Trails* and *Historic Water Routes*, and a proposal to establish scenic parkways for low-speed traffic in easily chosen areas of great scenic interest.

The Federal Government is prepared now to enter into this program on a national basis, but its success will depend upon consultation and negotiation with the provinces and territories and through them, with municipalities and individual organizations. Working together they can create a better way of life and preserve the unique heritage of Canada.



Historic restoration—bringing alive the spirit and appearance of buildings known to have played a part in the history of Canada—has been part of the repertoire of the National Historic Sites Service since the mid-1950's. Lower Fort Garry in Manitoba, Bellevue House in Ontario and the Palace Grand Theatre in the Yukon are but three examples of the exacting, incredibly detailed and often frustrating task of creating a past tense out of a flimsy present.

It is never the work of a single person; never even the labour of a single vocational or discipline. From concept to completion, restoration requires the talents of planners, designers, architects, archaeologists, historians, curators, artisans, craftsmen and a variety of skilled workers, many of whom must learn age-old skills and become facile with by-gone tools and equipment.

Each participant in the exciting pursuit of accuracy in historic restoration has a story to tell.

Susan Buggy, historical researcher with the National historic Sites Service, details some of the work she has compiled in conjunction with the Technical Services Branch, as background for the restoration of a portion of the historic Halifax waterfront. Wedged between a modern courthouse and a freeway interchange along the Halifax waterfront, a complex of typical 19th century offices and warehouses has been saved and is about to be restored.

Erected between 1815 and 1875, by businessmen of enterprise and prosperity, the structures, intended to display the eminence of their owners as well as serve



Historians and architects involved in restoration are indebted to such valuable pictorial documents as this photograph of the office of Pickford & Black (ca. 1930). The photo illustrates the alterations made during the building's turn of the century face-lift (see story) (Pickford & Black)

their immediate needs, have already outlasted their makers by almost a century of continuous utility.

The importance of the harbour community diminished greatly in the 20th century as water transportation took a back seat to that of land and air, moving the centre of attention away from the waterfront areas. These historic buildings were left to decline, with their neighbourhood, from bustling hives to mouldering ruins. The faithful restoration of exteriors and the conversion of interiors for practical "now—generating" use will distinguish them once again amidst their surroundings.

The Building

Constructed in 1830, the building illustrated is one of seven stone and wood structures to be restored. Its designer and builder are unknown but its first owner was Enos Collins, a Nova Scotian who acquired a fortune through patriotic privateering during the Napoleonic Wars and so invested his capital in insurance, loans, commercial enterprises and property that when he died, he was reputed to be the richest man in British North America. The building's subsequent owner for nearly a century was the international shipping firm of Pickford & Black, noted for its passenger and freight service to the West Indies and still retaining an honourable reputation, in Halifax, as agent for Lloyd's of London.

From the known

Although no early sketches or photographs of this building have been found, much of its original appearance can be determined from maps, later photographs, architectural examination and known features of comparable period structures. Stripping some of the stucco rendering (surface) for instance revealed its well-preserved, ironstone walls. A photograph taken about 1890 showed this three bay structure with a symmetrical pattern of sandstone-limned windows and leading doors along the wharf side. Above each set of doors was a dormer containing a housing beam, by which means, rideau and portuguese from South America and the West Indies could be raised for storage on the upper floors. The roof, hipped and covered with slate shingles was like that of the early 19th century Halifax Banking Company office and stone warehouse opposite. While initially the massive stone walls and small windows almost certainly continued across the west front, facing Water Street, a sketch used on a company letterhead in the 1880's depicted an already up-dated facade appropriate to the expanding shipping firm within.

An early 20th century remodelling of the office, extending it from single to double storey height with cast-iron columns to support the upper floors, made even "... more convenient premises than those occupied before..."

A flat composition roof, installed after a fire in 1904 and a two storey office added to the south wing in 1938 have, unfortunately destroyed the sense of proportion of the fine, early warehouse.

Restoration procedures will include replacement of the 19th century style pitched roof, removal of the southern appendage and the uncovering of the original stone exterior.

...to the unknown

To establish the general appearance of a building at a particular time and to create a design for restoring work, are first and not final steps in the rebuilding process. If the restoration is to be accurate, the engineer must obtain detailed information regarding precise features of the structure and the technical processes by which they were constructed.

In the instance of the slate roof, for example, how was the roof framed for slating? what was the degree of the slope of the roof? where were the slates obtained? what size were they? how were they held in place? how were the ridge and lower edges finished?

No study of slate roofs in Canada has been undertaken to date. However, since roofing and slate craft were well known in Halifax in the early 19th century, and imported from Britain, studies of buildings there, suggest the probable techniques used in Nova Scotia. English and American builder's handbooks, a few of which have been found in Halifax, also give evidence of the practices in general use. Moreover, slate roofs were not uncommon on stone business offices in the downtown area of Halifax in the late 19th century and some of these examples have escaped destruction by fire and replacement. A few slates from a contemporary building on the wharf have been discovered in its attic.

While local slate was not generally considered suitable for roofing, newspaper advertisements of the 1820's indicate that "Welch" slates were those most often imported to the town. Furthermore, records of the British army command at Halifax specify the quantity of slate and other building materials required for a few military buildings of known dimensions erected about the same time as the Pickford & Black building. Finally, a sketch of the mid-19th century contains a plan of the roof of the similarly styled Halifax Banking Company edifice opposite.

From such divergent sources as these, bits of information can be pieced together to evolve a picture of construction materials and techniques used in 19th century Halifax. In the absence of building specifications, they provide the basis upon which restoration can proceed.



The Rideau Canal

The Rideau Canal is a legacy—partly of fear, partly of the 19th century enthusiasm for canals.

After the War of 1812, British and colonial authorities were determined to find an alternate route to the St. Lawrence River which abutted American territory. By 1825 a decision had been reached to connect the Ottawa, Rideau and Cataraqui rivers between the largest town in Upper Canada at the time—Kingston—and the tiny settlement at the mouth of the Rideau River which was to become Bytown after the builder of the canal and later, Ottawa, the capital of Canada.

Six years of intense labour and skill began in 1826 under the able direction of Lieut.-Col. John By who superintended two companies of Royal Sappers and Miners in the building of the Rideau Canal. Among his accomplishments, Col. By offered an admirable solution to the problem of deserton which plagued posts close to American border. He recommended that each soldier be given 100 acres and his discharge upon completion of the canal. Upon acceptance of this recommendation, desertions decreased and many soldiers came to be among the first settlers along the new canal.

The canals which have been transferred are: in Ontario, the Rideau, Trent-Severn and Murray, in Québec, the Carillon, Ste. Anne, St. Ours and Chambly, and in Nova Scotia, the St. Peters—one of the smallest canals in the world.

Of the eight,

Canadians are probably best acquainted with the 124-mile-long Rideau Canal. Constructed during the period of rapid growth following the War of 1812, the canal is representative of the "canal-building era".

Like the others, the Rideau was carved from tangled forests, wild rivers and rock. Most of the natural construction materials were imported by pack mule or pack horse from the hot, humid, mosquito-infested swamps and poor sanitary conditions which were the lot of the pioneer canal builder.

Judith

Tulloch is an historical researcher

conducting part of the National Historic

Sites Service continuing study of the Rideau

Canal. Last summer, as part of her study,

she and a friend canoed the entire length of

the Rideau Canal. The following is a brief

impression of that journey.



5 The Basin at Merrickville. Here, the canal works consist of three locks separated by two turning basins. The basin is used to control load and unload (National Historic Sites Service)

The Rideau Canal was built to last a lifetime and it has—several. With help it may live forever. John By, of whom it was said, "If ever a man deserved to be immortalized in this utilitarian era it is Lieutenant Colonel By" was robbed of his honours by an ungrateful parliament for exceeding the estimated sum of £800,000 in the building of the canal. Little heed was paid to By's accomplishment in his lifetime.

The first twenty miles of the canal above Kingston follow the course of the Cataraqui River.

The great dams necessary to render the river navigable have also altered the Cataraqui's shoreline considerably. Low-lying land was drowned by the rise in the water level and outside the marked channel, submerged stumps present a hazard to larger vessels.

A series of inter-connected lakes with heavily wooded shores and small rocky islands characterize the Cataraqui section. For many people it is the most attractive part of the Rideau Canal.

Connecting the Cataraqui and Rideau sections is Upper Rideau Lake, from which drain both Cataraqui and Rivers.

Here, by created an artificial causeway to raise the level at the summit thus simplifying construction on the Kingston descent. The Narrows lock now artificially separates Upper Rideau Lake from Big Rideau Lake, the latter lake in the system 20 miles long and 5 miles at its widest point.

From Smith Falls to Ottawa, the canal follows the Rideau River. With highways along both shores, the quiet beauty of the lakes is lost to the intrusion of civilization. Only the sequestered lock stations offer a sense of isolation and serenity.

Particularly attractive are the locks of Clowes and Nicholsons, about 40 miles from Ottawa. Here, the channel crosses from one side of the river to the other in the

* Sir Richard Bonnycastle, *The Canadas in 1841*, (London 1841).

* Robert Leggett, *Rideau Waterway*, University of Toronto Press, 1972

half mile stretch between the two overflow dams—an apparent error which tradition ascribes to carelessness by a drunken surveyor. There seems, however, to be no reliable evidence for this colourful story.

Except for the flight of eight locks at the entrance to the canal at Ottawa, the most complex works on the Rideau River descend at Long Island Station near Manotick.

Three locks drop the traveller 25 feet—no mean achievement for the great stone retaining dams which is of particular interest. "31 feet high and over 700 feet long, it is a really noble pile of cut stone." Holding back 25 miles of river, this impressive structure is under constant and intense strain.

Within the city of Ottawa, the waterway flows through an artificial channel. Even this however, follows a natural depression in the terrain between Dow's Lake and the sharp bend at present-day Waverly Street. From there to the locks below Parliament Hill, extensive excavation was required and for years this portion was known as the "deep cut".

The first boat to travel the Rideau Canal was the sidewheeler steamer "Pumper" carrying Col. By and his family. That was in 1832—since then canals have been built by private industry and by military authorities against American invasion; the highway that opened much of eastern Ontario to settlement and trade. Its least and certainly most successful and satisfying role is that of playground for the Sunday sailor and boating enthusiast.

The Rideau Canal exists today almost unchanged from when it was completed a century and a half ago. As part of the total Conservation Program, this beautiful and historic canal will remain unchanged as part of our Canadian heritage "... for future generations".



6 Dam at Long Island—15 miles south of Ottawa. Here, this massive stone dam stretches the full width of the Rideau River and creates a stillwater extending 25 miles up the river to Bonnycastle's Rapids. (National Historic Sites Service)



7 Jones Falls—upper lock and basin. From this point the canal is 100 feet wide. The boat is dropped 60 feet through four locks and a basin. To the left is a small stone blockhouse. The dam is built of stone blocks about 1843. (National Historic Sites Service)